



Saint Elizabeth of Hungary



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FOREWORD

The Three Orders founded by Saint Francis have enjoyed from their very beginning singular blessings and seven centuries have given ample evidence of Divine approbation. From humble beginnings each Order, serving its own purpose, has built mighty bulwarks from a contrasting membership. The coarse brown habit has been the coveted garb of lowly peasants and royal personages. And at the present day the Orders scattered throughout the world possess, as in the early days, a tremendous influence in society—bringing numerous souls to the feet of God in the exercise of a truly Christian life, both within and without the cloister.

Among the illustrious members of the Third and, numerically, largest Order one zealous daughter, who has been rightly called “the greatest woman of the German Middle Ages,” stands out pre-eminently. This is the sweet and gentle Saint Elizabeth of Hungary who, if we are to compare her with the mighty women of the Old Testament, was endowed with a courage akin to Judith’s, possessed the docility of Ruth, was as intrepid as Esther in the face of danger, and as resigned as the mother of Machabees in the hour of trial. However, the youthful Princess is not only a great woman, but she is also a saint and for us the very ideal of Christian womanhood as well.

Into the brief span of the twenty-four years of her earthly career she condensed all that is elevating, noble, and heroic in a Christian woman’s life. It is significant that both she and Saint Anthony lived at the same time and entered Heaven in the same year.

During the year 1931, while the whole world rang with the praises of him who is the world’s saint, the Church desired that his Franciscan sister, Saint Elizabeth, should also be remembered as one whose life-story has a deeply practical lesson for the women of our day. Wherefore, Pope Pius XI wrote a special letter in which he eulogized her many virtues and called upon the women of every land not merely to admire but also to imitate her. No one better than Christ’s Vicar on earth *knows* how badly and how sadly the world needs women today who are cast in the same mould as the royal saint of Thuringia, if the neo-paganism that threatens to ruin society is to be effectively arrested.

Seven centuries have flown by since Elizabeth lived and worked in this world, but her name and fame, breathing forth the good odor of Christ, are still fondly cherished. It is no exaggeration to say that down the course of those centuries millions have been led to know and love Christ, in Himself and His suffering poor, better after having read her life-story. In these days when the Catholic Social Apostolate for women is so imperatively needed our saint will assuredly serve as a safe and encouraging guide. There is no sphere of woman’s life which she has not touched and adorned. Her appeal to human hearts is as universal as her charm is irresistible. She instructs young women regarding the stern, but vital, importance of modesty and self-restraint amid the seduction of an ungodly and sensuous world. She warns self-sacrificing women, who try to help their needy neighbors, that rebuff and ingratitude are to be expected. For wives, she mirrors the qualities that characterize loyal and dutiful love to their spouses. To mothers, she recalls the beauty and strength of maternal affection. To the rich, she silently preaches the spiritual independence begotten of detachment from earthly things. To the poor, she invites patience and resignation with their hard and bitter lot. For those in sorrow, she brightens and warms by showing the blessing that mourning and tears can bring. To those who are maligned and misunderstood by the world, she points out that persecution and trial are God’s sure way to a life of unending happiness in the great Beyond. For the lonely widow, she encourages them to lean on the strong arm of the Only Friend whose Providence is as infinite as His Power and Love.

We trust that our Christian women will ponder upon the moral of this brief and imperfect sketch of her life. May they learn from her to know and love better the suffering Christ and His suffering poor whom she loved with the strong, pure, and generous love of a valiant woman's heart.

The compiler wishes to acknowledge with deep gratitude the help he received from the following sources: *Lives of the Saints and Blessed of the Three Orders of Saint Francis* (Franciscan Sisters, Taunton), from which the main portion of the text is taken; *Saint Anthony's Annals* (Rev. R. Nash, S.J.); *Ideals of Saint Francis* (Felder, O.M. Cap.); *Catholic Encyclopedia*; *Third Order Forum* (U.S.A.); *Crusader* (Washington, D.C.); *Third Order and You* (Fr. Augustine, O.F.M.).

Sketch of the Life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary

ELIZABETH was born in the year 1207, her parents being Andrew II, King of Hungary, and his wife Gertrude, daughter of the Duke of Carinthia. At the same time a son was born to Herman, Landgrave or Prince of Thuringia and Hesse, to whom was given the name of Louis. The young princess was scarcely four years old when the Prince of Thuringia sent a solemn embassy to her father, to ask the hand of Elizabeth for his son Louis. If their embassy were successful the envoys were to bring the little child to the Thuringian Court, as was the practice at this epoch, so she might be trained early in the customs of a people of whom she would one day be the sovereign. Andrew acceded to the request and confided his little daughter to the ambassadors, after making them magnificent presents. Elizabeth was given into the charge of a virtuous lady, to be taken care of and to be taught the pure lessons of faith.

The Thuringian Court was witness to the dawning virtues of young Elizabeth. Indeed, even amid its worldliness, the little girl managed to preserve an uninterrupted realization of the presence of God. She would spend hours alone in the oratory of the palace and sometimes the maids-of-honor would find her kneeling in the corridor outside the oratory door deeply wrapt in prayer when the place was locked. Very few of those around her had any sympathy with her ideals and Elizabeth experienced the bitterness of a solitary life in the midst of a crowd. This state of affairs only served to make her lean more and more on her Divine Friend.

“O Sovereign Spouse of my soul,” she used to pray, “never permit me to love anything but in Thee and for Thee. In my heart I renounce all riches and pomp. O Spouse of my heart, so great is the love I bear Thee, that with joy I leave all that I am, that I may be transformed into Thee.”

Elizabeth had Agnes, a sister of Louis, for a playfellow. When the two young girls went to church they wore golden crowns studded with precious stones, but as soon as they entered the holy place, Elizabeth removed hers and did not replace it until she left the church. Duchess Sophia, the mother of Louis, was displeased at this behavior and asked Elizabeth why she did it. The young girl replied, “I could not appear arrayed in a gorgeous shining crown in the place where my Savior hangs, cruelly crowned with thorns.” This reply vexed the duchess and from that time there sprung up in her soul a feeling of envy, of which, as we shall see, the saint became frequently the victim. Moreover, it annoyed the duchess to see the child avoiding the Court festivities and taking as little part in them as possible. Instead, she preferred escaping from any long and idle conversations to aid the poor, to give wise advice to the young girls in her service, and to induce them to help her in her works of charity. The duchess would often say, “We must send her to a convent. She leads the life of the cloister here and does not understand the dignity of her rank.” These venomous words gave courage to the chief persons of the Court to say aloud what they thought. It did not seem to them Elizabeth was sufficiently well dowered to become the wife of a Prince of Thuringia. “It would be better,” they said, “to send her back at once to Hungary, or, better still, to marry her to some lord of the Court.”

Elizabeth heard these remarks. She also noticed that the persons accustomed to attend on her paid her less regard and respect. She shed bitter tears but she had recourse to the Supreme Master, and with humble fervor recommended her cause to Him. God did not desert her in the midst of her trials. He Himself was the Author of this union of two loving hearts. Indeed, Louis of Thuringia was worthy of having the saint as his wife. He walked in her footsteps in the fear of God and in the faithful practice of the Divine precepts. He loved Elizabeth chiefly on account of her virtues. He

admired in his future companion her heroism, gravity, modesty, austere yet loving devotion, zeal for holy things, and, above all, her tender charity towards the poor. The young prince's noble heart understood these beautiful and touching virtues and when he saw the Thuringian Court set against her he manfully took her part.

The marriage took place in 1221. The prince ordered extraordinary magnificence to be displayed on this occasion, wishing to show how much he prized the unappreciated qualities of his holy bride, and how much he scorned the insults of which she had been too long the victim. After this her enemies were silent, considering it more prudent to act thus. The name of the young princess was in every mouth. Elizabeth did not allow herself to be dazzled by her more prosperous condition. Anxious to please God, she redoubled her austerities and prayers. She practiced mortification every moment of each day. She limited herself at meals to what was indispensable to sustain life, and did this with simplicity, without any affectation and without losing any of the sweet cheerfulness that belongs to the children of God. Always attentive to the wants of those present, she managed to turn attention away from herself by multiplied acts of loving charity towards others. She accustomed herself to rise in the night to resume her prayers and increase her mortifications. The prince willingly acquiesced in this sort of life. He thanked God from his heart for having bestowed on him such a virtuous wife. Yet Elizabeth in her fervor did not lose sight of the duties of her state. She cherished a very strong affection for her husband. She leant upon him as the protector of her innocence and the consoler of her sorrows. God blessed His humble servant and likewise rewarded the virtues of the Prince of Thuringia. Three children were born to them to add to the joys of their domestic life.

The characteristic virtue of our saint seems to have been her tender and inexhaustible charity towards the suffering members of Jesus Christ. The poor were her friends and her children. The more repulsive their poverty and maladies, the more she loved to serve them. One day, a poor sufferer presented himself before her, his head covered with frightful wounds. Elizabeth took him aside, cut off his hair, washed his wounds, applied remedies to them, and then allowed him to rest his head, weary with suffering, for a few moments on her breast. Surprised in this kind act by some of her maids-of-honor and upbraided by them rather bitterly, she accepted their reproaches with a sweet smile. Elizabeth had recognized in this poor man, Jesus, the outcast of the world for the salvation of mankind.

Every year, on Maundy Thursday, this servant of Jesus Christ, herself washed the feet of twelve poor persons and gave them abundant alms. On the same day, she once collected several lepers, washed their feet and hands, and kissed their wounds. Elizabeth always had a special tenderness for these kind of sufferers. She never showed the least sign of disgust towards them and she never tired of exhorting them to patience nor of helping them with generosity. The pious princess imbibed this charity from the Heart of Jesus, through her love of the Cross and the Holy Eucharist.

At Mass she seemed to be wrapt in ecstasy, so sweetly was she absorbed in the contemplation of the Holy Mysteries. She could not sufficiently admire the Power, the Wisdom, and the Love of Our Lord in giving us this Sacrament, nor, at the same time, sufficiently esteem human nature, redeemed at the price of the sacrifice of the Cross, fed with the Flesh of God Himself, and a pledge of future glory given to it in the Sacrament of Love. The poor thus honored, thus sanctified, were great in the eyes of the noble princess, they were worthy of respect, veneration, and love. The lepers were thus admitted to the banquet of the King of Kings, not as strangers but as children and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, and could no longer be considered as the abject ones of the earth.

From the altar, she passed on to Calvary, there to contemplate again, God immolated for sinners, made as it were a leper, wounded and bruised and with no comeliness in Him, suffering unknown agonies. How then was it possible not to love the poor, not to cherish the sick, not to be compassionate towards all the troubles that overwhelm poor humanity? Charity springs from the Cross. Indeed, Elizabeth meditated unceasingly on the sufferings of our Crucified Lord. If she was admirable in her tenderness for the poor, it was because she was on fire with the love of the Cross, it was because she recognized in each poor person the image of God, born in a stable, living on alms, and dying destitute on the Cross.

She extended her care also, to the voluntary poor. The Friars Minor, lately settled in Germany, found a devoted protectress in the young Princess of Thuringia. She welcomed them with respect, built them a convent at Eisenach, the capital of the State, and chose from among them a learned and holy director, in the person of Father Rodinger, one of the first Germans who had entered the Seraphic Order. The evangelic life of the new religious, all she heard related of their Seraphic Father Francis, stirred the generous soul of Elizabeth. She was overjoyed to learn from them that though remaining in the world she could become a spiritual daughter of Francis by entering the Third Order.

With the consent of Prince Louis, the Friars Minor admitted her as a Tertiary. Saint Francis had already heard of her great virtues, of the benefits his Order had received from her, and he rejoiced over such a precious conquest. Persuaded by Cardinal Ugolino, afterwards Pope Gregory IX, Saint Francis sent his poor cloak as a gift to his illustrious daughter, and the pious princess, long accustomed to venerate Francis as a friend of God, received it with feelings of deep gratitude. It was a treasure that death alone would take from her.

In the year 1225, the Prince of Thuringia was in attendance on the emperor in Italy while famine was making itself felt in Germany. Knowing the generous disposition of her virtuous husband, Elizabeth considered it a duty to help all in need and not to leave any sufferers unaided. She therefore took whole families under her care, distributed food to them every day, and exhorted them to have confidence in the Providence of their Heavenly Father, Whose merciful Hand had more than once made Itself miraculously felt. As many of the poor, on account of their maladies, were unable to climb to the heights of the castle of Wartburg, Elizabeth established a hospital at the foot of the mountain where they found a shelter against the inclement weather, a bed to repose upon in their sufferings, remedies to cure them, and nourishment apportioned to their needs. Elizabeth established two other hospitals in the town itself.

Every day she went herself to visit her dear sufferers. She questioned them all in turn, so she might be able to prepare the remedies required by each, to dress their wounds, make their beds, and render them the most humble services. All this was done without showing the least repugnance. It was done with a calm, loving, and tender bearing--like a mother in the bosom of her family. A number of children, attacked by various maladies, were in one of these hospitals. The holy princess made herself their caretaker and did for them what even the most merciful charity might have shrunk from undertaking, so frightful were the wounds that afflicted some of these poor little ones.

Besides the poor maintained in the hospital, Elizabeth fed others in her own castle. On several occasions, it pleased God to multiply the food in the hands of His servant. Nine hundred persons were fed daily, either at the castle, the hospital, or in their own homes. It was thus that the inexhaustible charity of their pious sovereign was shown. Neither were the poor of the provinces forgotten. Elizabeth managed to find out and assist those at a distance as well as those near at

hand. The revenues of the State were, in her eyes, the natural property of those who were in want, she did not fear, therefore, to dispense them thus usefully.

However the heroic charity of the princess had not been able to live down distrust and envy. In the Thuringian Court there had always been jealous persons over whom her virtue had been unable to triumph. When the Prince returned from Italy he was besieged with complaints from those who managed his affairs. To listen to them, it would appear that Elizabeth had ruined him by her charities. "My castle is still standing," said the Prince calmly in reply, "allow my sister (for it was so he called Elizabeth) to continue her good works. Bread will not be wanting as long as we allow her to give to the poor." This answer silenced her detractors for a time. Louis of Thuringia showed himself worthy of his admirable wife by his ardent faith and the daily practice of every Christian virtue. He belonged to that strong generation of Catholic princes of the thirteenth century, of whom the king Saint Louis was the perfect model. He had also, in spite of his short career, made himself a great name, and it was not his least glory to have understood the merit of Elizabeth, to have made himself her strong protector and to have joined her name to his forever. Alas, the presence of the Prince and his publicly known affection for Elizabeth could not reduce the envious to silence. New accusations were made, under one pretext or another. God took upon Himself to justify her and make Himself her Defender. One day a leper presented himself to Elizabeth in a deplorable condition. Full of the deepest compassion, she gave him a bath, washed his wounds carefully, and then put him to bed in the Prince's own bed, he being then absent. The Prince arrived unexpectedly and was soon told of what had taken place. Vexed and angry, he rushed to his room and violently tore aside the curtains of the bed. A man was lying there, it is true, but the leprosy had disappeared from his body, a holy light encircled his brow, and ineffable majesty was reflected in every feature, he lay nailed by his hands and feet to a Cross. It was the Leper that the prophet had seen in his holy visions, laden with the sins of the people, the Only and Eternal Son of the Heavenly Father, humbled to the death of the Cross. Louis of Thuringia remained speechless at the sight, his passion changed into an unutterable emotion, better than ever, he understood the marvelous sanctity of his wife.

The writers of her life tell us many other wonders with which it pleased God to reward the charity of His saint. One day as she descended into Eisenach accompanied by her maidens and carrying meat and other provisions in the folds of her cloak, she found herself all at once face to face with the prince, who was returning from the chase. Astonished at seeing her bending beneath the weight of her burden, the prince wished to know what she carried. He opened her mantle himself, and to his astonishment it contained nothing but red and white roses, the most beautiful he had ever seen. This miracle has been the favorite subject of many well-known painters.

The holy princess was able to go on with her works of mercy for some time longer without troubling herself about the ill-will of her detractors, but great trials were soon to fall upon her. The envious were to have their day of triumph and this pure and heroic woman was to be plunged into inconceivable anguish. As a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, Elizabeth walked in His footsteps, in humility, meekness, and tender compassion for the infirmities of mankind. With Him she was to climb the hill of Calvary, to drain the bitter chalice to the dregs, and to steep her soul in vinegar and gall. She was found worthy of being attached to the Cross of her Beloved, unreservedly.

In the year 1227, an army of crusaders, mustered through the influence of Pope Gregory IX, was ready to embark at Brindisi, after the feast of the Assumption, under the command of Frederick II, Emperor of Germany. The Prince of Thuringia was one of the first among the Catholic royalty to take the Cross. In spite of her grief at his departure, Elizabeth not only helped him in his noble

determination, but accompanied him on a two-day journey beyond the limits of their dominions. The hour of parting was unspeakably bitter and the young princess wept as if a mournful presentiment weighed on her soul and Louis needed all his faith to carry out his sacrifice.

On his arrival at Troja in Sicily, Louis was received with the honor due to his rank by the Emperor Frederick II, whose dispositions had been so long uncertain that they brought the holy enterprise to nought. Louis of Thuringia was already suffering from fever before he embarked, but he did not consider his condition sufficiently serious to delay his departure for a few days. However, his illness increased with frightful rapidity and he received the Last Sacraments with a fervor worthy of a Christian hero. He saw that the time was come for him to quit this life, and, in the flower of his youth, he accepted the great sacrifice without a murmur or complaint, as if he had been on the battlefield. He adored the inscrutable designs of the Supreme Ruler, put himself and all those belonging to him under God's Fatherly Providence, and fell asleep in the hope of entering that Jerusalem which the impure feet of the sinner shall never defile.

The prince died on the 11th of September, near Otranto. The lords who were sent to carry this mournful news to Wartburg did not get there before the beginning of winter. Elizabeth had just given birth to her fourth child and was still ill. They were, therefore, received by the Duchess Sophia, whose love for her son's wife seemed to revive and she forbade anyone to tell her of the sorrow that had come upon her, for fear of endangering her health. Afterwards, when she thought the moment favorable, she went herself to Elizabeth to perform this heartrending task. The news was like a thunderbolt to Elizabeth. She remained speechless for a time, then clasping her hands, she exclaimed, "O Lord, my God! My brother is dead, he is dead! With him the whole world is dead to me." And her tears and sobs expressed her inconsolable grief. Elizabeth became a widow at twenty, after having been married about six years.

Elizabeth was inconsolable. She mourned the loss of her beloved husband but, at the same time, looked forward with terror to the future. For herself, it is true, she cared little but what was to become of the four little children with whom God had blessed them? However, she quickly regained her peace of mind and resignedly said, "If this news be indeed true and my dear husband is dead, I resolve from this moment to die as well--to myself and all earthly vanities." God at once accepted her offering, for no sooner was the report verified than the storm that had been brewing during Louis' lifetime now broke out with greater vehemence than ever.

Shortly afterwards, Henry, brother of the late prince, took possession of his states, at the instigation of ambitious courtiers, and sent some of them to go to his sister-in-law to reproach her for her works of charity, as if they had been so many acts of folly calculated to disgrace her family, and for her almsgiving, as ruinous extravagances from which the duchy had now to suffer. They were to inform her that, in punishment for these faults, she was to be deprived of her possessions and of her castle and she was to leave without delay. These hatefully cruel and flagrantly unjust orders were given in so merciless a manner that the Duchess Sophia, indignant at the audacity of the courtiers took her daughter-in-law in her arms and defiantly exclaimed, "She shall remain with me, no one shall take her from me. Where are my sons? I wish to speak to them." All protest was useless. Elizabeth was not allowed to take away the smallest thing. By force of circumstances, she had to leave empty-handed the palace that had witnessed her glory and her holy works. In the court of the castle she found her children and two of her loyal maids-of-honor, Guta and Ysentrude, who were robbed and driven out like herself. At the sight of her son's children the grief and indignation of the Duchess Sophia became unbounded. She again requested an interview with Henry and his brother Conrad. But the two princes had hidden

themselves lest they might be influenced at the sight of the tears of their mother and sister-in-law. Elizabeth and her children were now condemned to utter poverty. The love and affection of the Duchess Sophia for her daughter-in-law was revived, never again to alter, but she had to content herself with weeping over Elizabeth and her little ones. Everything had been planned to effect her ruin.

Throughout the whole painful proceeding Elizabeth maintained wonderful calm. Never once did she betray a sign of anger or resentment. Never once did she utter a word of complaint about Henry. Grace had so completely taken possession of her soul that like the Apostle Saint Paul she could rejoice exceedingly in the midst of tribulation. It is significant of Elizabeth that it is just at this time when one would expect her to be filled with sadness that she was caught up in the very torrent of Divine love and poured out her soul in expressions of deep affection. "Ah, my Lord and my God," she would exclaim, "may Thou be all mine and I all Thine! Nothing else matters. Let me love Thee, O Divine Lover of my soul, above all things. Let me not love myself or anything else but Thee alone. Empty my heart of all things earthly and fill it with Thyself."

Elizabeth, therefore, alone with her two faithful companions, on foot, descended down the path from the castle of Wartburg, where she had so often trod when dispensing her charities in the country around. She carried her new-born babe in her arms and the other three children followed, led by Guta and Ysentrude. It was bitterly cold, being in the depth of winter. The town of Eisenach, on which Elizabeth had showered her gifts, ought at any rate to have offered her some help, but orders had been issued that whoever should venture to receive Elizabeth with kindness would incur the displeasure of the new Landgrave. Eisenach showed itself worthy of such orders. All her services and all her kindness were forgotten. Not a door was opened to the weeping princess and her four children shivering with the cold. Fear had frozen every heart. Elizabeth soon found that, in this place where blessings had so often been called down on her, there was no one on whom she could rely. She went, therefore, to a miserable inn, where the owner consented to receive her. This man had only a stable to offer her, from whence first he had to drive out his beasts, and then make ready for her as best he could. But no sooner had she entered the place than peace returned to her soul. She was filled with holy joy and was exceedingly happy. It was indeed the abode of Bethlehem, such as she had had a glimpse of in her long meditations, such as she had been reminded of when visiting poor mothers whose poverty she had loved to relieve.

Having put her children to sleep, she continued to think over her new position without bitterness or repining. At midnight, she heard the bells ringing for Matins at the Franciscan Church nearby. She directed her steps towards the house of prayer accompanied by her two companions, assisted at the Office, and then with the genuine spirit of Franciscan joy, begged the religious to sing the Te Deum in thanksgiving for the misfortunes that had come upon her. It was her hour of signal triumph over the world and herself. At the first shock, nature had rebelled, and she staggered under the humiliation, but she quickly recovered, and allowed herself to be fastened to the cross.

Certain charitable and reliable persons secretly offered Elizabeth to take charge of her children until better days should dawn. Fearful they might sink under the daily privation that was now their lot, Elizabeth consented to this sorrowful separation. They were therefore hidden in places at a distance from the town and unknown to their persecutors. Once reassured on this point, Elizabeth no longer felt that her poverty was burdensome and she managed to make a living for herself by the labor of her hands. She even stinted herself in her poor food so she would have something to give away. Insults and gibes were not wanting in her time of trial and often these came from those whose poverty she had relieved. One day a poor beggar woman, whom she

had formerly befriended, pushed her roughly and made her fall into a muddy stream. She then added insults to her brutality by saying, "That is good enough for you. You did not choose to live like a princess when you were one so lie there in the mud like a beggar woman and do not expect me to pull you out." Elizabeth without losing her patience and meekness got up as well as she was able and began to laugh heartily over her fall, saying, "This is to make up for all the gold and precious stones I used to wear," and she set to work to wash her garments in the water close by.

The saint accepted everything that happened not merely with patience but also with gratitude. She made no account of man's share in it; her Heavenly Father alone was, in her eyes, the Dispenser both of good and evil. In the days of her great affliction, her enemies triumphed, the world forsook her and looked upon her as the most wretched of women, but her Divine Friend did not fail her. He proportioned His consolations to the measure of the afflictions that had become the lot of His faithful servant. He manifested Himself to her thus, initiating her into the happiness of Heaven and inebriating her with the joys of the Angels. The Queen of Heaven herself often appeared to Elizabeth. She instructed Elizabeth in the deepest secrets of the perfect life and raised her to the most exalted knowledge of the Divine mysteries.

However, the state of affairs soon changed. Matilda, Abbess of Kitsing-on-Main, Elizabeth's maternal aunt, hearing from the Duchess Sophia of the unexampled ill-treatment to which the pious princess was subjected, instantly dispatched some trusty messengers to bring her to the convent. The princes did not dare to interfere and Elizabeth was able for a few days to enjoy in peace the society of her children in this holy retreat. Soon her Uncle Egbert, Prince Bishop of Bamberg, heard in his turn of the misfortune that had befallen her in her widowhood. It was not enough for him that she should be in the sanctuary of Kitsing, he made Elizabeth come to his own states and offered to have her escorted back to Hungary. As she declined to accept this offer, he gave her the Castle of Botteinsten as a residence and an income and household befitting her rank. Then with her two faithful followers she resumed her pious exercises by day and night and the castle became a house of prayer and good works. The bishop also wished his niece to make a second marriage and, in fact, she might have become the wife of the Emperor Frederick II. But her choice was made, definitely and irrevocably; God alone was to be her portion forevermore.

The companions of Louis of Thuringia had brought back the remains of their beloved sovereign to Germany. Before their arrival at Bamberg, they acquainted the bishop and princess of their return and everything was arranged for the triumphal reception of the body of the great prince. The next day Elizabeth desired that the coffin be opened. In the presence of her husband's remains her deep and inconsolable grief was revived afresh. She shed tears and heaved deep sighs and was nearly succumbing to her unutterable sorrow. But at last she lifted her heart to God and strength returned to her soul. She thanked the Supreme Lord of all things for all that had happened and she accepted with touching submission the death of her dear husband.

The princes, who were the authors of Elizabeth's troubles, assisted at their brother's funeral, together with their mother, the Duchess Sophia. After the burial of the prince, his noble companions consulted together on the events that had taken place during their absence, and determined to remonstrate strongly with Henry and his brother. Four of them were chosen for this mission. Accompanied by all the knights, they went to the palace of the young princes, and there in the presence of the Duchess Sophia one of them reproached Henry with his unworthy conduct, the cruelty of his acts, his forgetfulness of his first duties and most solemn obligations, his ingratitude to his virtuous and illustrious brother, the insult offered to God by such conduct, and the disgrace brought upon the country of Thuringia. The Duchess Sophia wept. The prince was

so overcome that he also shed tears. He offered to make amends for his injustice and instructed four deputies to negotiate with Elizabeth the conditions of a reconciliation.

The saint, who was now more than ever detached from the things of this world, replied to Prince Henry's proposal, "I do not want either his castles or his towns, his lands, or anything that might encumber or disturb me, but I shall be very grateful to my brother-in-law if he will kindly give me from what is owing to me of my marriage dowry. That will enable me to meet expenses I wish to incur for the salvation of my dear husband and my own." An interview then took place between Henry and Elizabeth. Henry asked her pardon for the many grievous wrongs he had inflicted on her. Her only reply was to throw herself weeping into his arms. The Duchess Sophia, her son Conrad, and the knights, all mingled their tears with those of the holy princess. Her children's rights were vindicated. Her eldest son, Herman, was acknowledged as the lawful heir to the state of Thuringia and Hesse and Henry was confided to the care of the government during his minority.

After these arrangements, Elizabeth and her children returned to the castle of Wartburg from which she had been driven on the death of her husband. She lived there for one year and gave herself up to prayer, contemplation, and works of mercy. But soon the palace seemed to her too mixed up with the world and she ardently desired to find someplace where she could live in unbroken union with God. Not being able to get leave from her director, Father Conrad, of Marburg, to shut herself up in a Poor Clare Convent, she wore the habit of the Third Order, and added the three vows of religion to the practice of the Rule. Good Friday was the day she chose for this solemn consecration of herself to her crucified Lord. On that day she went with her children and household to the Franciscan Church and, there placing her hands on the altar, she vowed to renounce her own will, her relations and friends, and all the pomp and pleasures of this life, to belong unreservedly to her crucified Lord, and to follow Him till death in the paths of penance. The Guardian of the convent then cut off her hair, clothed her in the grey tunic, and girt her with the cord of Saint Francis. Further, she bound herself to go barefoot, which austere practice she observed faithfully to the end of her days.

Having made this solemn vow, Elizabeth dedicated all the income her director had not allowed her to give up to the relief of the poor. She wanted to beg her bread, but not having received permission to do so, she endeavored to live like a poor working woman by the labor of her hands.

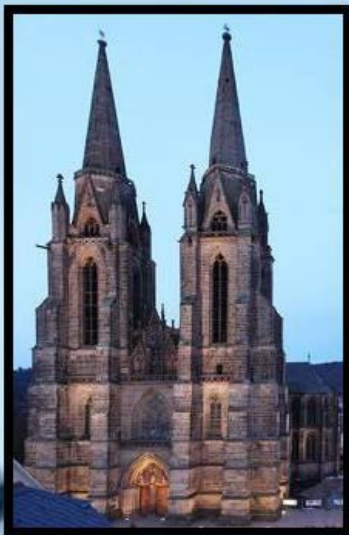
She concentrated her chief attention on the Marburg hospital that she had founded so she could devote the evening of her life entirely to the sick. She spent day and night in their service--cleansing and dressing their sores, administering the remedies, and consoling and leading them to God. Even the most repugnant task could not make her recoil. The lepers, hideous though they were on account of their awful disease, were her dearest friends and she consecrated herself to them with incomparable heroism and unspeakable joy. With heroic love she took a poor girl afflicted with the leprosy to her bosom. The dreaded disease had so badly deformed the poor child that no one in the hospital had the courage to touch her or even to gaze upon her. Elizabeth brought her to her own little room and gave the sufferer her own bed, cleansed her sores, and spent many hours with her, speaking to her with motherly affection and tenderness. "Oh, how fortunate we are," she would say to her companions, "how fortunate we are to be allowed to wash and clothe Our Lord and Savior in the person of the leper." One day she said to the Father Provincial, Father Gerard, "Oh, my Father, the most ardent desire of my heart is to be considered and treated as a leper. I wish they would construct for me as for the poor people a tiny hut of clay and straw, and hang in front of it a piece of linen warning the passersby, together with a

poor box wherein alms might be placed.” Countless miracles marked the latter years of Elizabeth’s life. Her name became more and more celebrated, the sick and infirm came in great numbers to implore the help of her prayers, and Our Lord, not willing to be outdone in generosity, was pleased to grant the petitions of a heart that beat with such heroic charity.

God did not long delay the end of His servant’s earthly career. She died on 17th November in 1231. Those who stood around her death bed marveled at the peace and calm with which she was filled. Her last words were, “Oh, Mary, come to my assistance. The moment has arrived when God summons His friend to the wedding feast. The Bridegroom seeks His spouse.” Then she added, in a low tone, “Silence . . . Silence,” and breathed forth her soul. At her burial those who were present saw on the roof of the church an immense number of little birds who sang so sweetly that all were filled with admiration.

Very soon after the death of Elizabeth miracles began to be worked at her grave in the Church of the hospital, especially miracles of healing. Father Conrad showed great zeal in advancing the process of Canonization. At the Pope’s command three examinations were held of those who had been healed but before the process was finished Father Conrad was murdered (on 30 July, 1233). Two years later, however, the process was brought to a favorable conclusion, and the solemn ceremony of Canonization was held by Gregory IX--the same Pope who canonized Saint Francis and Saint Anthony--at Perugia, on Pentecost Day of the year 1235. It is interesting to note that her brother-in-law, the Landgrave, Conrad, was present at the ceremony.

In August of that year, the corner-stone of the beautiful Gothic Church of Saint Elizabeth was laid at Marburg. This edifice is the greatest monument ever erected to any woman with the exception of the Blessed Mother of God. A year later the body of the saint was taken up in the presence of the Emperor Frederick II and in 1249 was interred in the choir of the church itself. Pilgrimages to the grave soon increased to such an extent that it could be compared with the shrine of Saint James at Compostella. In 1539, Philip the Magnanimous, Landgrave of Hesse, who had become a Protestant, put an end to the pilgrimages by prohibiting them and by forcibly removing the relics. Nevertheless, the entire German people are still intensely devoted to “Dear Saint Elizabeth,” as she is tenderly called. In 1907 a new impulse was given to her veneration in Germany and Austria by the celebration of the seventh centenary of her birth.



PRAYER TO SAINT ELIZABETH

O Merciful God, enlighten the hearts of Thy faithful, and grant that through the glorious prayers of the Blessed Elizabeth, we may despise the pleasing things of the world, and ever enjoy the consolations of heaven, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

THE THIRD ORDER OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The reader will have noticed that the great formative influence in the life of Saint Elizabeth was the Third Order of Saint Francis. She was received into it while still a young girl—only fourteen years of age—and during the brief span of ten years until her death one sees the gradual flowering of all those virtues that are inculcated in the Third Order Rule.

She is one of the greatest ornaments, and is, with Saint Louis IX of France, its special patron.

But what is this Third Order, the reader may inquire, that claims the glory of Saint Elizabeth? The Third Order was founded by Saint Francis as a means whereby people living in the world could attain Christian perfection without leaving home or family. There are many people who are unable or have not the inclination to enter religion, and yet who feel called to lead a more perfect life. For such people Saint Francis wrote the Third Order rule. By it he brought the religious life into the world by helping people to observe the spirit of the vows of religion. The Rule of the Third Order does not bind under sin yet is eminently suited to devout Christians who are anxious to lead a life of perfection. Its aim is primarily one's own sanctification and then the sanctification of others by good example.

The Rule has three chapters but the following is a summary of its chief obligations:

1. Candidates for admission to the Order must be at least fourteen years of age, must be practicing Catholics, must be of good character, and must make a year's probation or novitiate before being admitted to Profession.
2. From the day of reception into the Order, Tertiaries are obliged to wear the small scapular and cord.
3. They must observe moderation in dress, in amusements, and in eating and drinking, and must say grace before and after meals.
4. They must go to confession and communion at least once a month.
5. They are to recite the daily office of twelve "Our Fathers," "Hail Marys," and "Glorys."
6. They are to set a good example in their home life and protect those under their care from the baneful influence of evil literature.
7. They are to cultivate charity and love of peace and refrain from unkind and injurious words.
8. They are to assist, if possible, at daily Mass.
9. They are to examine their conscience every evening.
10. They are to assist at the monthly meetings of the Congregation, unless they are prevented from doing so by reason of distance or some other lawful excuse.
11. They are to visit one another in time of illness, whenever possible.
12. They are to say the rosary on the death of a fellow Tertiary and offer communion for the repose of the soul.

Numerous indulgences and privileges are attached to the Third Order but one worth mentioning is known as the "Communication of Indulgences." The First Order of priests and brothers, the Second Order of Poor Clares, and the Third Order of people in the world form one large spiritual family. In virtue of this Communication of Indulgences, members of the Third Order participate in life and death in all the Papal Indulgences granted to the First and Second Orders and also share in all the spiritual fruits of their good works. These marvelous graces strengthen the Tertiary in efforts towards Christian perfection, and give the Tertiary comfort and security amid the trials and temptations of the world.

A person may join the Third Order by applying to any Franciscan Church or to any other Church where the Third Order is established. People who live where there is no Franciscan Church may, of course, be members of the Third Order and follow out the Rule of life, provided they are received by a Franciscan Father or by one who has obtained the necessary permission.

The lives of the saints are given to us for our imitation, and this sketch of the life of Saint Elizabeth will be of lasting profit to the reader if it inspires him to follow her example and to enter the Third Order that led her to such great heights of sanctity.

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